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Waley, Arthur David, trans

# CHINESE POEMS

Confucius heard a boy singing:

"When the waters of the Ts'ang-lang are clear,
They do to wash my cap-tassels in.
When the waters of the Ts'ang-lang are muddy,
They do to wash my feet in."

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—

1916.

LOAN STACK

## NOTE

Arthur Waley, who translated the poems which are here reprinted by his permission, is an English sinologist and man of letters whose whole body of work is only now starting to receive the attention which it deserves. Waley, educated at Rugby and King's College, Cambridge was, for some twenty years, on the staff of the British Museum, and has himself told the story of how he came to the study of Chinese and Japanese in the second edition of *One Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems* (1962), first published in 1918. One comes upon anecdotes of his immense erudition, together with his intense reticence, in the recollections of the Imagists and Vorticists as well as in those of the Bloomsbury Circle but no one group ever seems to have held him completely.

The list of Waley's contributions to scholarship in the form of learned articles is a long one, but nevertheless, in his books he has always been particularly sensitive to the needs and interests of the reader who may be no sinologue. *The Way and its Power* (1934), *The Book of Songs* (1937), *The Analects of Confucius* (1938), *Three Ways of Thought in Ancient China* (1939) and the *Nine Songs* (1955), bring to life ancient China in vivid fashion and have been much drawn upon by archaeologists and anthropologists. His monumental translation of the Japanese novel *The Tale of Genji*, the six volumes of which appeared between 1925 and 1933, brings to the English-speaking reader one of the classics of world literature.

But poetry has been a lifelong interest of Arthur Waley ever since his undergraduate days. His translations rank as poetry in their own right, a fact recognized long before 1936 when W.B. Yeats included his work in *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse*. Dame Edith Sitwell acknowledged his sensitivity when she observed to Jack Lindsay that he and Arthur Waley were the only two people who knew what her early poetry meant. Some of his own poems, together with some short stories, appeared over the years in periodicals. Most of these were reprinted in *The Real Tripitaka* (1952) and *The Secret History of the Mongols* (1964).

This reprint is a facsimile, without the corrections (which he made by hand), of the collection of translations which Waley had printed for private circulation in 1916. He recounts, in characteristic fashion, the story of the beginnings of the little book in the second edition of *One Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems*. The brochure soon dropped from sight but the fact that, of the fifty-two poems which it contains, only thirteen were subsequently reprinted, justifies it being brought out again. Five copies of it are known to be extant. They were originally given to A.G.B. Russell, Dora Carrington, Sydney Cockerell, Clive Bell and Logan Pearsall Smith, while others, of the approximately fifty printed, were destined for such people as Laurence Binyon, Lowes Dickinson, Eliot, Roger Fry, Pound, R.C. Trevelyan, and Leonard Woolf.

A subvention from the Research Council of Rutgers University made possible this reprinting of Arthur Waley's little-known first book.

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# CHINESE POEMS.

## BATTLE [lit: Dying prematurely on behalf of Country], by Ch'ü Yüan. 4th Cent B.C.

"We grasp our battles-spears: we don our breast-plates of hide.
The axles of our chariots touch [those of the enemy]: our short swords meet.
Standards obscure the sun: the foe roll up like clouds.
Arrows fall thick: the warriors press forward.
They menace our ranks: they break our line.
The left hand trace-horse is dead: the one on the right is smitten.
The fallen horses block our wheels: they impede the yoke-horses."

They grasp their jade drum-sticks: they beat the sounding drums.
Heaven decrees their fall: the dread powers are wroth.

The warriors are all dead: they lie on the moor-field.
They issued, but shall not enter: they went, but shall not return.
The plains are flat and wide: the way home is far.
Their long swords are at their side—their Ch'in bows in their hand:
Though their limbs were torn, their hearts could not be repressed.
They were more than brave: they were inspired with the spirit of "wu"
["military genius."]
Steadfast to the end: they could not be daunted.
Their bodies were stricken, but their souls have taken Immortality—
Captains among the ghosts, Heroes among the dead.

## ODES VIII. 8. c. 1000 B.C.

[The poet criticises the absurd "culte" of hunting which prevailed in Ch'i. He parodies the compliments addressed by one hunter to another.]

The hunting-dog rattles its bells;
The master is beautiful and benevolent.
The dog has a big bell attached to a small;
Its master is admirable and has fine whiskers.
The hunting-dog has two little bells attached to a big one;
Its master is superb and has a profuse beard.

## ODES IX. 4. c. 1000 B.C.

[A young soldier thinks of home.]

I climb the tree-clad mountain,
And look towards my father's house.
My father is saying, "Alack-a-day,
My son is gone to serve his prince.
Day and night I cannot rest.
God grant he may look after himself,
And come safe home again."

I climb this naked mountain
And look towards my mother's house.
My mother is saying, "my youngest son
Has gone away to serve his prince.
Day and night I cannot sleep.
God grant he may look after himself,
And come safe home again."

I climb the crest of this mountain
And look towards my brother's house.
My brothers are saying, "Alas, he is gone,
Our young brother, to serve the prince;
That night and day was our companion.
God grant he may look after himself,
And come safe home again."

## ODES XII. 5. c. 1000. B.C.

### THE BROKEN TRYST.

The willows by the eastern gate—
Their leaves thick, thick.
Evening was the time we said,
And now the Morning-star is shining.

The willows by the eastern gate—
Their foliage dense, dense.
Evening was the time we said,
And already the Morning-star is fading.

With golden trappings, a horseman—wandering.
At her weaving-loom—a lady thinking.
The spring goes, and still he does not come back;
The flowers are gone and only leaves are left.

(pre-T'ang.)

## ON A DANCING GIRL.

Relying on favour,—seems about to advance;
Overcome by modesty, not yet dares move.
Her red mouth utters a sweet song;
Her jade fingers sport on the gay strings.

(pre-T'ang.)

## THE RECRUITER. (Tu Fu. T'ang.)

At evening I sought a lodging in Shih-kao.
There came a recruiting-sergeant to the house.
The old man jumped over a wall and hid;
The old woman went to open the door.
The sergeant shouted, oh! how angrily!
The woman wept, oh! how bitterly!—
"Listen to the words of her who stands before you.
My three sons fought at Yeh Castle.
One wrote to say that two were dead.
The one that is left only steals* life;
The two that are dead are gone for ever and ever.

In my house there is not a man left,
Except my daughter's baby sucking at breast.
His mother would have fled, but she's pawned everything,
And hadn't enough clothes to leave the house in.

I am old, and grown very feeble;
But let me come straight away with you.
I still might be useful with the army—
To get ready the soldiers' morning rice." †

Night went on and at last the voices stopped;
I thought I heard the sound of stifled sobbing.
At day-break I went on my way again;
But only the old man saw me off.

[This poem is like a French "conte" in miniature.]

* *i.e.* lives in constant danger.

† The old woman concealed her husband. She thought that by offering herself she could allay suspicion. She didn't think they would really take her. But they did.

## A NIGHT PROMENADE. (T'ang.)

This spring evening the double gates are open,
And I wander out to breathe the night fragrance.
The splendour of the moon is like a prolongation of the day's brilliance,
And the light of the lanterns mingles with that of the stars.
On the southern dyke—blue-clad horsemen;
In the eastern quarter—red-powdered cheeks.
Of flutes and harps the music discernible from afar;
Of silks and satins an odour perceptible in the dark.
The streets are choked with men singing as they walk;
Carriages surround the theatres and cock-pits . . .
Long before my wanderings were finished
The bells and drums sounded from the Long Willows.*

* A palace where dawn was announced in this way.

Weeping I hear the separation night-song.
Sadly I hold the parting-time cup.
Henceforward from this day onwards
Shall you think of me again, or no?

pre-T'ang.

The sinking sun is pale and lightless.
Nearing the river, alone, I water my horse.
Puff, puff—the night-wind high.
Swish, swish—the flying geese—down.

pre-T'ang.

## ON AN OLD HARP. (Po Chü-i. T'ang.)

Of cord and cassia-wood is the harp compounded.
Within lie extremely ancient melodies.
Ancient melodies—weak and savourless,
Not appealing to present men's taste.
Light and colour are faded from its jade stops.
Dust has covered its rose-red strings.
Decay and ruin came to it long ago.
But the sound that is left is still cold and clear,
And I do not refuse to play it to you.
But even if I play, people won't listen.
. . . . . .
How did it come to be neglected so!
It was because of the Ch'iang flute and the Ch'in flageolet. *

* Barbarous modern instruments.

## NIGHT RAIN. (T'ang.)

The early cicadas chirrup and again are silent.
The guttering candle goes out, and again flickers
Beyond the window—I know there is night rain.
The banana-leaves anticipate its sound.

(*i.e.* the pattering on the banana-tree leaves is the first indication.)

(T'ang. Po Chü-i.)

The peach-trees I planted years ago
Are this year full-grown trees.
The baby-boys of last year,
This year are learning to walk.
We are startled to see things grow up.
Without noticing our own decay.
What is gone, alas, is of no profit.
Our young years cannot halt in their course.
Therefore I now write this thought
And commend it to all my friends and relations:
IF WHEN YOUNG YOU MAKE NOT MERRY,
WHEN YOU'RE OLD YOU WILL BE SORRY.

HAN DYNASTY (1st Cent. B.C.). Traditional.

Green, green the mallow in the garden
Waiting for the sun to dry the dew-drops on it.
The warm sun diffuses a fertilising vapour;
Ten thousand things are generated by the light's effulgence.
Ever dreaded, the autumn season comes;
Burnt yellow the flowers and leaves decay.
The hundred rivers eastward travel to the ocean;
Never shall they turn back again to the west.
. . . . . .
If when young you fail to use your strength
Grown old, in vain you shall sorrow and lament.

## AN ILLNESS. (T'ang. Po Chü-i.)

Sad, sad—, stricken with long illness.
Monotonous, monotonous days and nights passing.
The summer trees have clad themselves in shade;
The autumn flowers already house the dew.
The eggs that lay in the nest then
Have changed into birds and flown away.
The insect then hidden in its cocoon
Is now turned into the cicada on the tree.
The seasons go on for ever in this way.
Nothing stops even for the veriest moment.
Only the sick man's inmost heart
Deep down still aches as of old.

[The four following verses written by women and all T'ang Dynasty.]

I am like the water in the brook;
The water flowing never leaves its pebbles.
Your heart is like the down of the willow-trees;
Following the wind with no fixed course.

c.f. the Spanish copla:

Tu querer es como el toro;
Donde lo llaman, va,
Y el mio como la piedra;
Donde la ponen, s'está.

## SUMMER RAIN.

A summer day, but the North wind cool.
Behind the eaves, the rain's threads long.
Threads that cannot weave a man's gown,—
But only can cleanse his heart.

Ku-su terrace above, the moon, round,—round.
Ku-su terrace beneath, the water trickle, trickle.
The moon sinking on the western side, will rise, rise again.
But the water flowing eastward away, when shall it ever return?

## ON A SAYING OF LAO-TZU:

## "TRANQUILLITY OVERCOMES HEAT." (T'ang.)

Throngs of men, to escape the heat, run like madmen.
Only the Meditation-master quietly sits in his room.
How is it that the Hall of Meditation cannot be reached by the heat?
Only tranquility of heart keeps the body cool.

On the side of the Northern Hill—tombs and mounds in rows—
Since ten thousand antiquities and myriad autumns opposite Lo city.
In the city day and night—the sound of singing and bells.
On the hill only hear pine and cypress murmur.

(T'ang.)

In her boudoir, the young lady,—unacquainted with grief.
Spring day,—best clothes, mounts shining tower.
Suddenly sees at the dyke's head, the changed colour of the willows.
Regrets she made her dear husband go to win a fief.*

(T'ang.)

* She urged him to enlist out of vanity, hoping to become a sort of Lady of the Manor.

## BALLAD. (pre-T'ang.)

I was brought up under the stone castle.
My window opened on to the castle tower.
In the castle were beautiful young men,
Who waved to me as they went in and out.

In the night palace the curtains are drawn.
The wandering fire-flies flutter and pause.
Through the long night I embroider summer clothes;
Thinking of you, I wonder "How long?"

(pre-T'ang.)

The bamboo leaves tap on the southern window.
The moon's light shines on the eastern wall.
None knows how at night awake alone
On my pillow I shed twin* tears.

(pre-T'ang.)

* *i.e.* from both eyes simultaneously, implying a high degree of grief.

Yellow dusk: messenger fails to appear.
Restraining anger, heart sick and sad.
Turn candle towards bed-foot;
Averting face—sob in darkness.

(pre-T'ang.)

The white cloud on the hill is almost gone.
The still wind under the pines has died away.
From whom has he parted, the man up there—
On the lonely terrace, staring at the bright moon? *

(pre T'ang.)

* People went up on to high terraces to watch their departing friends as long as possible.

The willows—green, green, down to earth droop.
The willow flowers thick, thick, whirled heaven-wards fly.
The willows' branches' breaking is over; the flowers' flying done.
Beg to ask, absent man return, not return?

(pre T'ang.)

[In the first line it is spring; in the second, summer; in the third, autumn; but still he has not come.]

Drunkenness after—joy without limit!
Much pleasanter than before being drunk.
Every movement turns into dance.
Every word turns into poetry.

(T'ang.)

## THE SCHOLAR RECRUIT.

Now late, I follow Time's necessity.
Mounting a barricade, I pacify remote tribes.
Discarding my sash, I don a coat of rhinocerous skin.
Rolling up my skirts, I shoulder a black bow.
Even at the very start my strength fails.
What will become of me before it's all over?

## WRITTEN BY WANG WEI ON A PORTRAIT OF HIS FRIEND.

This picture shows you as you were then.
Now you are old and not like this.
But in it your recent acquaintances
May see how beautiful you were when we were young.

(T'ang.)

## THE SOLDIER'S WIFE. (pre T'ang.)

Flop, flop, the willows by the castle.
Green, green, the mulberry-trees on the Hill,
She brings her basket, but forgets to pluck the leaves;
Last night she dreamt of Yü-yang.

[It is autumn and the soldiers ought to be returning from the summer campaign; although the mulberry-leaves urgently require picking to feed the silkworms, she forgets to fill her basket. Last night she dreamt of Yü-yang, the frontier town where her husband is fighting.]

c.f. ODES I. 3. (Couvreur's translation):

J'essaye à plusieurs reprises de cueillir de la bardane;
Je n'en remplir pas même une corbeille . . .
Hélas, je pense à mon époux,
Et laisse mon panier sur la grande route.

## THE EJECTED WIFE. (pre-T-ang.)

Entering the Hall, she meets the new wife;
Leaving the gate, she runs into former husband.
Words stick; does not manage to say anything.
Presses hands together: stands hesitating.
Agitates moon-like fan, sheds pearl-like tears,
Realises she loves him as much as ever—
Present pain never come to an end.

[The Emperor Wu regrets having to leave behind his mistress, when he departs from the Capital on business.]

Autumn wind rises: white clouds fly;
Grass and trees wither; the geese fly south.
Orchids all in bloom, chrysanthemums smell sweet.
Thinking of lovely lady, not can forget!

Floating-pagoda boat crosses Fen River;
Athwart the mid-channel are aspen-leaf waves.
Flute and drum keep time to the sound of the rowers' song.
In the midst of revel and feasting, my thoughts sad.
Youth's years how few! Age, how sure!

(Han Dynasty.)

[Tu Fu, in war-time, visits the celebrated tower of Yo-yang, by Lake Tung-t'ing. Owing to the war, he was in exile and without means and could get no news from his friends.]

Long had I heard of Tung-t'ing Lake,
And now at last I stand on Yo-yang Tower!
The lands of Wu and Ch'u lie severed East and South.
Sky melts into earth by day and by night.
From friends and dear ones not one line!
Old and ill, my home is a solitary boat.
Hun-cavalry swarm to the North of the Passes—
While I lean weeping on the pagoda-railing.

(T'ang.)

[The husband of a woman of the land of Ch'in is fighting in the northern land of Yen. The spring comes in Ch'in, when it is still winter in Yen.]

The grass of Yen is like a gray thread
When the mulberry-trees of Ch'in are already laden with green branches.
He has only just begun to think of home-coming;
But my heart is already bursting.
Spring winds, you are no friends of mine;
Why do you steal behind my gauze-curtain?

(Li Po.)

With plum blossoms are laden this year's trees.
Again I visit former days' pond.
My heart is full of previous seasons' memories,
Just as the flowers burgeon on former years' branches.*

* By the Emperor Yüan-ti of the Liang dynasty.

## SONG OF THE MEN OF CHIN-LING MARCHING BACK INTO THE CAPITAL.

Chiang-nan is a glorious and beautiful land
And Chin-ling an exalted and kingly province!
The green canals of the city stretch on and on
And its high towers stretch up and up.

Flying gables lean over the bridle-road
Drooping willows cover the Royal Aqueduct.
Shrill flutes sing by the coach's awning
And re-iterated drums bang near its painted wheels.
The names of the deserving shall be carved on the Cloud Terrace.*
And for those who have done valiantly, rich reward awaits.

(pre-T'ang.)

* The Record Office.

## WRITTEN BY A MAN WHO WAS SECRETARY TO AN UNSCRUPULOUS GENERAL BUT HAD TO RESIGN.

The autumn wind, how fierce, fierce!
The white dew turns to morning frost.
The weak branches are swaying night and day;
The green leaves get yellow hour by hour.

The moon rises over a bank of clouds;
I open the door and go into the courtyard.
Whirr, whirr—the wings of the wild-geese,
The wild-geese flying far away—
Yes, the Man of Will* makes the whole world his pawns,
While I sit alone in an empty hall.
The years of my youth will soon run out—
And what comes next is bitter and irksome.

* His late master.

## THE BULLS AND THE BAMBOO-PLANTATION.

In the midst of the field is a little, rocky hill
Where shady bamboos contrive a mutual verdure.
O boy, that with a three-foot switch
Causest to tremble these elderly bulls—
I, your master, love those rocks.
Do not let your bulls rub their horns on them.
That they should rub their horns is perhaps pardonable;
But if they fight, they will damage my bamboos.

(Huang T'ingchien. Sung.)

Han Yü was banished to a malarial island because he had reproached the Emperor for encouraging Buddhism. This was written "en route."

At dawn I sent a single warning to the throne of the Nine Steps;
At evening I was banished to Chao Yang, eight thousand leagues.
Striving on behalf of a noble dynasty to expel an ignoble government,
How should I, withered and worn, deplore my future lot?
The clouds gather on Ch'in Mountains, I cannot see my home;
The snow bars the passes of Lan, my horse cannot go forward.
But I know that you will come from afar, to fulfil your set purpose,
And lovingly gather my bones, on the banks of that plague-stricken river.

(T'ang.)

At dawn of day I enter the old temple;
The first sunbeams strike the forests of the summit.
A winding path penetrates hidden places—
Till it leads to the Cell of Meditation deep amid flowers and trees.
The mountain light gladdens the bird's mood
And the shadows on the pool* empty man's heart.
The thousand pipings of Nature are here stilled;
Nothing is heard but the beating of the Temple gong.

(T'ang.)

* *i.e.* hypnotise him; a Buddhist expression.

I drive away the yellow orioles
Bidding them cease to chatter on the tree;
For their song disturbs the course of my dream,
Before it reaches Liao-hsi.

[Where her lover is.]

(T'ang.)

## COMPLAINT OF AN IMPERIAL CONCUBINE WHOM THE EMPEROR HAD CEASED TO VISIT.

In the Little Park the oriole's song has ceased;
At the Long Gates--the dancing butterflies many,
Before my eyes another spring is going
And still his blue chariot does not come.

(T'ang.)

## WRITTEN BY THE EMPEROR WU-TI OF THE LIANG DYNASTY.

An Allegory.

In the high trees—many doleful winds.
The ocean waters lashed into waves.
If the sharp sword be not in your hand,
How shall your friends remain many?
Do you not see that sparrow on the fence?
Seeing the hawk, it casts itself into the snare.
The fowler to catch the sparrow is delighted;
The young man to see the sparrow is grieved.
He takes his sword and cuts through the netting.
The yellow sparrow flies away, away.
Away, away up to the blue sky
And down again to thank the young man.

(pre-T'ang.)

## RECORD OF A DREAM.

Father and brother scolded me when my hanging* tufts began;
Now old and unsuccessful—hairs on head few.
Paper bed-canopy, iron lampstand, wind and snow night—
In dreams still recite young-time lessons.

12th Cent.

* When first he wore the boy's "coiffure." He dreams he is a boy again, reading in bed under the paper bed-canopy, etc.

## ON SEEING THE RUINS OF THE KING OF YUËH'S PALACE.

The King of Yuëh shattered Wu and came home again;
His soldiers dispersed to their villages and donned embroidered clothes.
His court ladies like flowers filled the Spring Palace—
Now what is left? What but the wild swan's flight?

(Li Po.)

## IN THE SOUTH.

The oozing heat of this southern province overcomes me like the fumes of wine
Deep have I slept upon my couch beside the Northern window.
At this noon-time nought else is awake, no sound stirs—
But mountain-boy beyond the wood drumming on his tea-pot.

(T'ang.)

I wandered by the river-side and plucked the white frog-bit.
I went along with the other girls to pray to the River-gods.
Among them all I did not dare to say my prayer aloud,
But tossed in the dark, a golden coin—to augur about my love.

(T'ang.)

[Literally: to augur about absent man, *i.e.*, whether he fares well or ill: girls picked frog-bit for luck.]

## KING WU'S CONCUBINE, HALF-DRUNK.

The wind stirring the lotus-flowers, brings their scent to the Water Palace;
On the Ku Su Terrace, she sees the King Wu.
For his benefit she staggers through a dance, graceful in spite of her helplessness.
Then sinks laughing on to her white bed beside the eastern window.

(Li Po.)

## THE WANDERER'S SONG.

The skein of silk in the mother's hand
Is become the coat on the wanderer's back.
When the parting was near, how close she sewed!
Fearing he might be a long while away.
. . . . . .
Can the heart of a blade of grass repay
The generous light of the April sun?

(T'ang.)

## SUMMER'S NIGHT SONG.

I turn and toss on my embroidered bed;
I have not quite pulled the curtains to.
Do not come to me yet awhile,
But wait till I have completed my "toilette."

(pre-T'ang.)

## ON COMING TO A TAVERN.

These days, continually fuddled with drink—
Fail to satisfy the appetites of the soul.
But seeing men all behaving like drunkards,*
How can I alone remain sober?

* Written by Wang Chi during the war which preceded the T'ang dynasty. "Like drunkards," *i.e.* indulging in their idiotic war.

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